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A Note towards an Understanding of Emerson's over Soul

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Abstract: Over soul is based on the doctrine of self-trust. Emerson seems to be inspired by the great classics, religious literatures and the Upanishads. Emerson believes that Energy is never destroyed, it is transferred. He also believes in the transmigration of soul, reality of the one deity, and the oneness of the over soul. He says that one can understand the over soul only after becoming moral and ethical right.

Key Words: American Renaissance, Over soul, Supreme, Nature, Moral and Ethical Uplift, Self Reliance)

Emerson represents renaissance voice of America. He combined a boisterous energy with a rational and judicious piety. Emerson accepts that everything in the universe is a manifestation of that supreme soul, (the over-soul) and it is not possible it to be detached from that universal soul. In his works Emerson has emphasise the necessity of recognizing the transcendental sources and ends of the universe and of human life. His ideas were deeply influenced by the Indian Vedic philosophy, German scholars and ancient Greek philosophers.

Regarding his idea of over soul he says that over soul comprises of "unity with in which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other" (Mcleer, p. 160). His concept of 'Over soul' outlines a way which can provide sustenance to millions of people whose life is fraught with debts and dissensions, pain and misery, rootlessness and changeability. Emerson tried to reform his country and his society through his wittings. His essay Self-Reliance opens with the following lines he borrowed from 'Epilogue to Beaumont and Fletcher's Honest mans fortune';

"Man is his over star; and the soul that can Render an honest and a perfect man, Commands all light, all influence, all fate; Nothing to him falls early or too late. Our acts our angels are, or good or ill, our fatal shadows that walk by us still." (Emerson, p. 155)

Soul is the master of itself and man is the body only. The soul takes a man to its desired goal. Soul is very powerful, and it is empowered in itself. It knows everything and is beyond time and space. It is in every man, the only need is to awaken it for its purpose. It follows us every time and gives commands and instructions but we fail to understand it. Through his essay 'Self-Reliance'

Emerson advocates to trust the over-soul. For him, self-reliance means to be in obedience with the 'over soul and to rely on the almighty god. Emerson writes in 'Self-Reliance':

"The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure, that it is profane to seek to interpose helps." (Emerson, p.164)

The relationship between the soul and the divine sprit or over soul is very pure. It is an internalised faculty. When the soul is awakened it realises its Potential, and the journey begins.

"Our age yields no great and perfect persons." (Emerson, p.168)

Man is found to be imperfect and running behind success. He does not want to indulge in fruitful activities nor does he know anything about fruitful activities. He is mesmerised by the surrounding glitter of materialistic ideas. He neither knows nor tries to know what is beneficial for the development of his real self. From the very beginning he loses heart and begins an enterprise. The natural result follows and he is doomed. He is not aware of self truth or self reliance so he cannot make effort to restore himself. He does not want to learn from society, from religion, from education or from art. Sometimes he depends upon unseen fortune and measures his esteem by what others say of him.

"I suppose no man can violate his nature." (Emerson, p.160)

Emerson exhorts all men to know their worth and keep things under their feet. No man can violate his nature. He should know that there is power in him, it is inborn. If he is weak, he must have looked for good out of him and elsewhere but if he perceives himself and examines his own thoughts. A miracle would soon be worked out. He has to come out of his superstitious. He has to learn

not to imitate but to insist on himself. If he attends his own work, all evils will be repaired. He will soon discover what his nature is and he will love it. If he follows truth, he will be safe and successful at last. Man must remain upright and think that he possesses a divine spirit. And when he starts desiring, god will speak to him. When a man is simple, it receives divine wisdom. Soon things will start changing and he will see god near him and thus life will smile on him.

It is no wonder that a true man belongs to no other time or place out he is the centre of things himself, where he is there is nature. Once this recognition dawns upon his mind, the over soul expresses itself. And this is the moment when man must surrender himself fully and act in accordance with the instincts of his soul. The instincts are not different from those that govern our universe.

Over soul implies purification of mind, which is devoid of all evil thoughts, and imaginations. It possesses a strong belief in oneself and practically it is to become self-reliant. Emerson recommends that if people have faith in moral sentiments and sufficient belief in the unity of things, he will know how to obey the over soul. Once this happens all physical, mental and spiritual ills would disappear. It is useless to think and find material aids to help attain spiritual consciousness. In fact he has to rely on himself for guidance. But if there is intellectual rigidity, he would never be able to become aware of his spiritual consciousness or the over soul. Emerson argues in his essay that people should rely on moral sentiments and have faith in the unity of things; it will help to maintain the society to grow without any artificial restraints.

'The American Scholar' is an essay that illustrates man's undivided personality. Emerson says that man is basically a 'thinking being'. There is a creative soul in man which tries to find expression; therefore Emerson lays emphasis on the man. Man is always greater than his functions and he should always remember that he is a man. It is necessary to understand that Emerson talks of Scholar as a 'man thinking' and not man as simply a thinker. For the evolution of man Emerson shows the path. There are three factors which shape the man - Nature, Mind of the past and active participation in life. Man and nature corresponds with each other, therefore he must learn to know nature "so that he can know thyself" which is identical with study of nature. The scholar must read god directly. Live life and feel life. He should not allow tradition to crush himself rather he should renew his creativity.

All minds are self sufficient parts of the universal mind which keeps on expanding. So Scholar must receive the world in his mind. Experience is the means and measure of knowledge. The scholar must also have 'Virtues'. The first is Self-Trust. The scholar should be free, brave and fearless. He should not blame time

because all times are good. He should embrace the common and pray to time to give him insight into today. This design will unite the farthest and the lowest. The utmost qualities which will put the man on the path of evolution to awaken his spiritual qualities are - self-sufficiency and self-dependence. Emerson says so because man is 'an indivisible unit', he is one and all. He is not simply an Engineer or a doctor, but he is everybody. He will be degenerated if he is mere thinker, but he has to evolve as a 'man thinking'. He has to learn from every incident and time. He must believe in action, rather fit actions so that he may get the richest returns of wisdom. Being a man of action his mind will grow as thinking, acting and reproducing a chain. This will shape his character which is higher than intellect and this will strengthen his soul also. He will know the world and its real nature. Instead of running after money and power, he must run after the unity of himself and learn from the past experiences and appropriate them in the present. Such character would give him spiritual strength and potential to awaken his soul.

Over soul is based on the doctrine of self-trust. Emerson seems to be inspired by the great classics, religious literatures and the Upanishads. So Emerson considers that by knowing the self man knows all man. If he looks inward, he will find the universal soul. Emerson believes that Energy is never destroyed, it is transferred. He also believes in the transmigration of soul, reality of the one deity, and the oneness of the over soul. Emerson was well aware of the Indian scriptures like the Vedas, the Bhagwad Gita, and the Vishnu Puran. According to Emerson, over soul is beauty, love, wisdom and power. It is from over soul that we have our intuition of truth and justice. The intelligence of over soul is similar to what is described as platonic unity. Every human mind has an intuition of over soul which is omniscient, immanent and benevolent. It also implies that unless man believes in self-reliance, he can not experience his over soul.

Man's faith in over soul rises in a moment and he must understand it. He must believe that human life is not mean. And he should understand to distinguish between the good and the bad. The intuition comes from the soul. And Emerson describes the over soul as:

"Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal one . . .

we see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree, but the whole of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.

(Emerson, p.203)

Over soul fills human life with many worthy things. Every valuable thing is an

embodiment of that supreme soul. It makes human life more significant. For one who is capable of comprehending the knowledge of over soul and to establish union with it can feel divinity in his living and all around him. He can establish union with the nature as well.

*"If the red slayer thinks he slays,
or if the slain think he is slain.
They know not well the subtle
ways I keep and pass, and turn
again. (Emerson, p. 51)*

Under the influence of Hindu oriental philosophy: He has written Brahma in which he proclaims that If the slayer thinks that he slays or the slain thinks that he is being slain, both are wrong. They are unaware of the absolute reality, the Brahma. They don't know the mystic ways of the world. The soul is immortal; it gets birth, lives and passes away for rebirth. The soul never dies, it just changes the body. As in Bhagwat Gita, Krishna says that we change our old and tattered clothes to new one, same way the soul changes the old body to get a new. Only the body is burnt and not the soul. In another poem 'Hamatreya' which is again influenced by Indian scripture 'Vishnu Puran', Emerson says-

*"They call me theirs
who so controlled me;
Yet another one
Wished to stay, and is gone.*

*How am I their,
If they can not hold me
But I hold them?(Emerson, p.71)*

People fight for a piece of land claiming it to be their but the earth says that, who so ever claimed are it to be theirs are all dead and buried under the earth, so when they are unable to hold the earth how it can be theirs. In the same perspective we can think of all other material things too whom we claim to possess. Everything will be left here only after death, so people should try to gain the knowledge of reality, the absolute truth. Nothing is to survive on the earth but the spirit, the soul.

Emerson's poem 'Maia' presents Hindu concept of 'Maya' or illusion. Maya means illusion or that cannot be understood. Here are the lines:

*"Illusion works impenetrable,
Weaving webs innumerable,
Her gay pictures never fail,
Crowds each on other, veil on
veil,"(Emerson, p.103)*

Maya is impenetrable (i.e. it cannot be known or penetrated through eyes of wisdom). It weaves numerous webs of illusion one over another. People easily fail to understand its reality and falls in its false happiness. It keeps on heaping the veils of illusion.

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